

# Clawsons Concentrate

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Clawsons will then buy corn from Auen at the silo on a tonnage basis.

"So far we've used it all," George said, adding he purchased 786 tons of corn last year that Auen grew on about 80 acres of the Clawson farm.

"Whatever is over and above that, he (Auen) harvests it and takes it home."

The result is that the Clawsons have better quality forage than before, more time to comfort their cows, and fewer expenses.

In the past it has taken the Clawsons two weeks to pick all their corn. Auen's harvesting equipment will probably take it off the fields in a couple of days, George said.

The time saved by not having to work in the fields has let the Clawsons pamper their cows with more clean bedding, more fresh air and fresh water, and a more comfortable barn.

"Cow comfort — that's the main thing they stress to us," George said.

The result has been increased milk production.

Back in December 1996, the Clawsons' herd was averaging about 55 pounds of milk per cow per day. Then the Clawsons stopped crop farming and started spending more time with the Holsteins.

"We had nothing under 70 pounds per cow per day by the summer of 1997," George said. And by this spring milk production from Clawsons' 53 cows had edged up to about 75 pounds per cow per day.

The Clawsons previously milked three times per day, but this spring they cut back to twice a day. Milk production dropped only by about four pounds per cow per day — not significant enough to justify the extra work, in George's opinion.

In the old days — especially during the summer — the Clawsons easily spent more time in the field than in the barn with the cows.

"We just fed, bedded, and milked them," George said. "The rest of the time was field-work."

The Clawsons have found that their increased presence in the barn during the day encourages the cows to get up and move around more often. And when they do get up, they often eat a little more.

Eliminating crop farming also cut some major expenses.

"Basically I need only one tractor now. Before I had four," George said. "Repair bills just ate us up."

Their equipment maintenance costs now are "next to nothing" because they're not running machinery nearly as much.

Dennis noted farm fuel costs have dropped significantly, too, from approximately 4,000 gallons a year as crop farmers to about 1,500 gallons last year while concentrating on the cows.

One of the first things the Clawsons did with their extra time was start a major remodeling of their barn. They began by pulling off part of the sides.

"We opened the barn up to get a better air flow," George said. "Before, we didn't have an open barn at all. The more we open it up, the better results we see."

He added that even the people caring for the cows feel better with the added light and ventilation.

The barn is cleaner now, also. "We scrape the barn every day, and they're telling us to scrape it twice a day," George said.

The Clawsons prefer sand for bedding in the stalls.

"Sand is non-organic. It helps curtail the mastitis problem and it keeps the cows cleaner," George said.

Fresh sand is added as often as needed to keep a clean, comfortable pad under the cows. That

means about 20 tons per month. The attached milking parlor — added five years ago — is clean and cool and well-lighted. Eight cows can be milked at once on each side.

Some of the improvements made for increased cow comfort haven't cost anything, Dennis said. For example, in the stalls along the barn walls the Clawsons removed one board from the wall at the cows' eye-level when they're lying down. The gap allows the cow to gaze out across the pasture while they're resting and have a breeze in their face.

The Clawsons have a few more improvements they want to make. Still to come are curtains for the open sides of the barn and a sprinkler over the feed bunk to keep the cows cooler and encourage them to eat more. In the stalls they want to raise the neck rail about 14 inches so the cows won't bump their heads when they stand up, and they plan to install brisket boards to position the cows better in the stalls when they lie down.

The concentration on cow care at the Clawson farm has made life better not only for the Holsteins but for the Clawsons, too.

"The stress factor is tremendously different," George said. "When you don't have the crop end of it, the stress is much less," especially the tension of coping with the weather at planting and harvesting time.

So why aren't more farmers concentrating on just crop farming



The Clawsons spend extra time pampering their Holsteins. From left, George, Dennis, and Ginny Clawson.

or milking cows, but not both?

"Just tradition," is George's explanation. "Traditions are hard to break. It took a lot of years and a lot of people saying to me, 'You need to specialize'."

Ginny suggests the change may just be natural evolution. When she and George were children, she noted, farmers typically raised

crops and also had cows, horses, pigs, chickens, and sometimes other animals. Over the years most farmers narrowed their activities to caring for just one species of animal and raising the crops to feed them.

"This is just another specialization," Ginny said.

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